

CONSERVATION POLICY for WARMUN ART CENTRE COMMUNITY COLLECTION

Under Review at 26 August 2024 in line with development of Strategic Plan (for annual review at the Warmun Art Centre Annual General Meeting).

PURPOSE

A Conservation Policy is a set of rules about how the Warmun Community Collection will be cared for. It will make sure the Warmun Community Collection is well organised, looked after, and accessible to the community. The Art Centre Board will oversee its protection to help keep Gija culture strong.

POLICY DETAILS

This Policy is practically-focused to help Warmun Art Centre staff best manage the requirements for the care, preservation and protection of the Warmun Community Collection. This Policy is in line with the Code of Ethics of the Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material.

Aims of the Conservation Policy

This Policy will help Warmun Art Centre staff best manage the requirements for the care, preservation and protection of the Warmun Community Collection through establishing standards for:

1. Preventive Conservation
 - a. Documenting the Condition of the Collection
 - b. Establishing annual baseline data on the storage and display areas in line with the ten agents of deterioration
 - c. Identify what can be improved immediately, over the medium term and over the long term
 - d. Establishing process and procedures in line with the Preventive Conservation needs of the Collection
 - e. Ensure fit-for-purpose disaster preparedness and disaster response plans are in place
 - f. Ensure that fit-for-purpose preventive conservation guidelines are in place
2. Conservation Treatment
 - a. Documenting the Condition of the artwork or object before a decision is made about the best treatment
 - b. Identify the cause of the damage or deterioration and ensure that the preventive conservation guidelines are updated to take account of this
 - c. Identify what needs to be done in consultation with a professionally-qualified conservator
 - d. Establishing process and procedures for treatment of items in the Collection
 - e. Ensure fit-for-purpose decision-making tree is in place, including with input from family members and artists when necessary

- f. Ensure all documentation relating to treatments of artworks and objects is properly archived

Agents of deterioration

The ten agents of deterioration describe the areas where artworks and objects are at risk. These form the basis for the Conservation Policy and are:

1. Physical forces
Mechanical damage caused by the effect of force including impact, shock, vibration, pressure and abrasion. Damage can range from small cracks to crushing and collapsed structures.
2. Thieves and vandals
Theft or vandalism of asset, leading to its disappearance, destruction or disfiguration.
3. Fire
Results in partial or total loss of object, deformation and/or smoke staining from accidental or intentional causes. Organic materials are more likely to be damaged by fire than inorganic materials. Fire can lead to water damage from firefighting or from fire extinguishers.
4. Water
Damage caused by contact with water through events including flooding. This can lead to deterioration by dissolving of some materials, staining, weakening, corrosion, and/or initiating other deterioration mechanisms including biological growth. Both organic and inorganic materials that are moisture-sensitive, can attract and absorb water and are porous are susceptible to water damage.
5. Pests
Destructive feeding or nesting behaviour of insects or animals that results in staining, loss, weakening and accretions. Pests often require specific temperature and relative humidity (RH) conditions to thrive, and generally prefer organic objects. The use of pesticides can introduce harmful pollutants into a space.
6. Pollutants
Gaseous and particulate contaminants from outdoor and indoor sources that can cause physical and chemical deterioration. Sometime materials in display cases or exhibitions spaces or storage containers can cause damage by causing harmful materials to build up near artworks and objects.
7. Light, ultraviolet and infrared
Light is a kind of energy and can cause long-term and permanent colour fading dependent on level of exposure, material type and colourant. The heat in light can cause drying and cracking. UV can also cause deterioration as it is a high energy but invisible light.
8. Incorrect temperature
Temperature must be stable to reduce chances physical and chemical degradation. High temperatures may cause physical damage, cause chemical reactions (including

those caused by pollutants), and increase the likelihood of mould and bugs. Low temperatures can cause embrittlement.

9. Incorrect relative humidity (RH)

RH represents a percentage of water vapour in the air relative to temperature. As temperatures increase, air can hold more water molecules and becomes more humid with unsuitable RH ranges, extremes and fluctuations. These can lead to other agents of deterioration including pests, pollutants and physical forces. Some materials are more likely to be affected by fluctuating or high or low humidity.

10. Dissociation

Temporary or permanent loss of information about an asset, causing value and knowledge loss. Common sources include poor documentation, and hardware and software obsolescence.

In line with this Policy and the Collections Management Policy, Warmun Art Centre will conduct a six-monthly audit of its collection and collection storage areas to ensure compliance with these policies. Post-Covid audits were conducted in 2022, 2023 and 2024 and a range of recommendations made:

1. Install signage regarding collection handling and to monitor further movement of objects. Proposed wording:

Overall handling of objects

Many objects in this collection are fragile and old

For protection, objects are carefully stored with supporting boards and protective layers

Please cover the objects when they in storage or are not on display or being examined

When handling

- Use protective layers and support boards when handling or moving the objects so that you don't need to touch the objects unless absolutely necessary
- Avoid contact with ochre pigments
- Keep paintings items flat, do not bend or twist
- If removing an object from a drawer, return to the same drawer
- Please cover the objects when they in storage or are not on display or being examined

Removing works from the Warmun Community Collection Store/Media Lab

- Make sure you have authorization/approval from the Art Centre Manager to move any objects
- Fill in logbook on removal of object and return

2. Documentation for movement of artwork

- Fill in the following information in the Movement of Artwork Logbook

Item number

Location Index number

Item description

Item condition

Date of removal

Purpose of removal

Where is item to be taken
Return date
Item condition inspection on return

3. Risk identification and management

An assessment of risks were identified including:

- Fire from long grass growing around the art centre
- Flood from Turkey Creek flooding
- Dust
- Accidental damage
- Theft

Documentation

The Collections Management Policy outlines the documentation requirements and should be read in collaboration with this Policy.

In addition to standard documentation a conservation documentation program needs to be put established with baseline data that can be updated during the six month review.

Risk Management & Collection Care

The Collections Management Policy outlines the documentation requirements and should be read in collaboration with this Policy.

Acquisitions & Deaccessioning

The Collections Management Policy outlines the acquisitions and deaccessioning requirements and should be read in collaboration with this Policy.

Training

One staff member needs to be responsible to care for the Collection, as outlined in a Position Description which includes ongoing provision for training. It is also important to have contacts for appropriate persons for work on secret/sacred materials.

A regular training program that will enable the development of qualifications and that aligns to Position Descriptions is an important first step.

Resourcing and reviewing

The Collections Management Policy outlines the acquisitions and deaccessioning requirements and should be read in collaboration with this Policy.

Particular resource issues relating the Warmun Community Collection are:

- There is currently not enough space for the current Collection.
- The historical digital record is not easy to access and the two documentation laptops need a IT maintenance program to make sure they are upgraded as needed to ensure access.
- Further collection organisation and/or expansion is required to accommodate the Collection.

- The Collection is housed in purpose-built BAC plan cabinets. These units provide passive insulation, protection from light and dust. Drawer labelling needs to be maintained to reduce the risk of dissociation.
- A base conservation resource kit with conservation grade materials for use with the Collection needs to be established and maintained.
- Conservation funding is needed to support the conservation of the Collection.
- There is no staff member who currently has responsibility for reviewing the condition of the Collection, and conservation is not included in Position Descriptions.
- It is also important to have contacts for appropriate persons for work on secret/sacred materials.

REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed annually at the Warmun Art Centre Annual General Meeting. It is currently under review in line with the development of the Warmun Art Centre Strategic Plan.

INFORMING DOCUMENTS

AICCM, *AICCM Code of Ethics and Code of Practice* at: <https://aiccm.org.au/about/code-ethics-and-practice/>

Canadian Conservation Institute, CCI Notes at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/conservation-institute/services/conservation-preservation-publications/canadian-conservation-institute-notes.html>

Heritage Collections Council, *ReCollections* at: <https://aiccm.org.au/conservation/collection-care/>

Museums and Galleries NSW, *Online Resources*, at: mgnsw.org.au/sector/resources/online-resources/